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Minimalist Ideas on Parametric Variation

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0. Introduction

Linguistic theorizing, as carried out within the Principles and Parameters framework, has proceeded, to date, largely uninformed by pertinent facts revealed within the sub-discipline of dialectology. While the theory has been significantly articulated by reference to proposals regarding attested morpho-syntactic differences between languages, the study of synchronic variation as observed between and within dialects of the same language, with notable exception, has been relegated to the domain of sociolinguistics. However, it should be clear that an informed assessment of dialectal variation and change can afford unique perspectives into the constraints and limits on possible grammars, and in turn, make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the nature of the language faculty. Drawing on the insights of Henry (1995, 1997) and Wilson and Henry (1998) on variability in Belfast English, the present work departs from the perspective that dialects of languages may exemplify typological distinctions, and as such, may be defined within the parametric limits afforded by Universal Grammar. Such an orientation to the examination of varieties of Spanish avails a view of the Dominican Spanish vernacular as a source of facts appropriate to a theory of language, rather than as a peculiar linguistic object that deviates from the pan-American normative standard. Speech samples, collected from speakers representative of diverse backgrounds, amply attest to the intralingual variation that serves to distinguish Dominican Spanish from other varieties; said variation centers on the availability of null referential and expletive subjects and the positional licensing of subjects in declarative, non-finite, and interrogative clauses. The descriptive generalizations of the differential patterns observed

between Dominican Spanish and Standard Latin American Spanish and within the dialect itself are amenable to analysis within Chomsky's (1993, 1995) Minimalist Program, where linguistic variation is expressed in terms of the morphological strength of abstract CASE features specified on lexical items, and the requisite feature matching that motivates movement of these elements to functional projections. Thus, the distinguishing properties that emerge from inter- and intra-dialectal comparisons will be shown to be characterized by highly constrained differences relating to the strength of morpho-syntactic specifications that entail the presence or absence of particular derivations and derived structures. It will be argued specifically that speakers of Dominican Spanish have available an I-language that is variable between parameter settings of nominal TENSE and AGR features; on this view, speakers are bi-lingual in their native language, a state of affairs that typifies linguistic change in progress.

1. Overview of the Data¹

In marked contrast to Standard Latin American Spanish, in which subject pronouns are typically expressed only for emphatic purposes, Dominican Spanish allows for subjects to be freely employed, without added pragmatic force, as in (1). (Note that the subjects under consideration appear in italics in the ensuing transcripts.) This tendency has proliferated throughout the personal pronominal system, and is observed even for inanimate subjects, as in (2), where in normative speech, only a null pronoun is felicitous.

(1) overt subject pronouns with specific and non-specific human reference:

- a. *Yo* no lo vi, *él* estaba en Massachusetts, acababa de llegar, pero muy probable para el domingo pasado, que fue Día de las Madres allá, *él* estaba en Nueva York. ...*El* estaba donde Eugenia, y *yo* creo que *él* se va a quedar allá ... 'I didn't see him, he was in Massachusetts, he had just arrived, but quite probably by last Sunday, which was Mother's Day there, he was in New York....He was at Eugenia's, and I think that he is going to stay there ...'
- b. *Nosotros* a veces nos descuidamos, salvo que no sea para un discurso, como por ejemplo una entrevista. ...En eso *nosotros* nos descuidamos mucho, los dominicanos específicamente. 'We sometimes are careless, except in cases of speeches, as for example an interview. In that we are careless, dominicans specifically.'
- c. *Ellos* me dijeron que *yo* tenía anemia...Si *ellos* me dicen que *yo* estoy en peligro cuando *ellos* me entren la aguja por el ombligo, *yo* me voy a ver en una situación de estrés. 'They told me that I had anemia...If they tell me that I am in danger when they put the needle in my belly-button, I am going to find myself in a stressful situation.'

¹ This work draws on several primary sources. Preliminary speech samples were collected in the Dominican Republic in 1992 by the author, and additional data was gathered in New York in 1997 by Kimann Johnson. In 1998, the author again traveled to the Dominican Republic and New York to complete more extensive interviews in the service of a larger study of Dominican Spanish; data was collected from forty-six speakers representative of diverse socio-economic classes and geographical regions.

(2) overt subject pronouns with specific non-human reference:

- a. [Re: river] *Él* tiene poca agua. (cf., e.g., *Tiene poca agua.*) 'It has little water.'
- b. [Re: buses] *Ellas* se saben devolver en Villa; *ellas* pasan de largo. 'They often turn around in Villa; they pass you by.'

As shown in (3), this preponderance of subject pronouns is corroborated in the over-use of *uno* 'one' with first-person singular reference, and with impersonal reference alongside the neutral pronouns *tú* and *usted* 'you' (in/formal), where other dialects might employ a null non-specific plural pronoun or an impersonal *se* construction. And perhaps the most intriguing and most telling characteristic of the dialect is the presence of the non-referential pronoun *ello*, which is completely devoid of thematic content and force; this overt expression of an expletive, exemplified in (4), is striking, as it has no equivalent expression in other varieties of Spanish.

(3) personal and impersonal neutral pronouns *uno*, *tú*, and *usted*:

- a. *Uno* cuando vino *uno* no sabía mucho el español, porque *uno* habla su inglés. *Uno* miraba a los muchachos jugando y *uno* ahí trancadito. Poco a poco *uno* se adaptó... A mí me gusta allá, pero entonces, como *uno* tiene su negocio aquí... *uno* no va a coger para allá para trabajarle a otro. (cf., e.g., ...Cuando vine no sabía mucho el español...) 'When I came I didn't know much Spanish, because I spoke English. I looked at the kids playing outside and I was locked up. Little by little I adapted... I like it there, but then, since you have your business here... you're not going to go there to work for another.'
- b. Entre *tú* más estudias *tú* te vas proyectando mejor y estás adquiriendo más experiencia. Algo que *tú* no conoces o no conocías a través de los estudios *tú* lo vas a conocer. Si *tú* decías una palabra mal anteriormente, ...*tú* ya la hablas correctamente. 'The more you study the better you project yourself and acquire more experience. Something that you don't know or didn't know through studies you begin to know. If you used to say a word badly before, you now speak it correctly.'
- c. Todo es relativo a como *usted* vea las cosas. ...Algo que no me gusta es que *usted* tenga que trabajar para mantener a los vagos. 'It's all relative to how you see things... Something I don't like is that you have to work to maintain the lazy.'

(4) overt expletive pronoun *ello*:

- a. *Ello* llegan guaguas hasta allá. (cf. *Llegan guaguas hasta allá.*) 'There arrive buses there.'
- b. Ellos querían renovar el centro para el turismo y *ello* hay mucha gente que lo opone. 'They wanted to renovate the center for tourism and there were many people who opposed it.'

Another prominent distinguishing feature of Dominican Spanish is the pattern of word order attested in declaratives, interrogatives, and infinitival constructions. The word order of declaratives in Standard Latin American Spanish is relatively free, demonstrating

a sensitivity to pragmatic considerations such as theme-rheme requirements. In contrast, word order in Dominican Spanish is relatively fixed— subject-verb-object— irrespective of subject type or verb class, a fact frequently noted in the literature. Further corroboration for the fixing of pre-verbal positional licensing for subjects is the fact that the pattern is maintained even in questions, where the Standard Latin American Spanish norm requires that the verb appear in second position, pre-posed to the subject (cf. Toribio 1990, 1993b, Suñer 1994). As shown in (5), in Dominican Spanish the pre-verbal position is available to pronouns and full NPs alike (again, the subject phrases under consideration appear in italics).

(5) interrogatives:

- a. Papi, ¿qué *ese letrero* dice? (cf. Papi, ¿qué dice *ese letrero*?) ‘Daddy, what does that sign say?’
- b. ¿Cuánto *un médico* gana? ‘How much does a doctor earn?’

The dialect also employs an additional strategy as a means of circumventing the inverted order, namely, the pseudo-cleft illustrated in (6), which could explain the focus strategy, in (7), whose null operator is very pronounced in the Dominican vernacular (cf. Toribio 1992, 1993b).

(6) pseudo-cleft:

- ¿Dónde fue que *tú* estudiaste? (cf. ¿Dónde estudiaste (*tú*)?) ‘Where did you study?’/‘Where was it that you studied?’

(7) focus strategy:

- Allá en los Estados Unidos *yo* hice fue el kinder. ‘There in the United States I went to kindergarten./ It was kindergarten I went to.’

Finally, and more interestingly, Dominican Spanish permits overt pre-verbal subjects in non-finite (infinitival and gerundive) clauses, as in (8), the attested subject-infinitive order standing in marked contraposition to that observed in Standard Latin American Spanish, in which the subject would appear post-posed to the infinitival verb (cf. Toribio 1993a).²

(8) non-finite clause with overt nominative subject:

- a. Ven acá, para *nosotros* verte. (cf. Ven acá, para verte (*nosotros*).) ‘Come here, for us to see you.’
- b. ¿Es que no te dicen sin *tú* preguntar? ‘It’s that they don’t tell you without you asking.’

Before proceeding, it merits stressing that null subject pronouns and post-verbal positioning of subjects are indeed available to the speakers sampled. A review of extended transcriptions (cf. Toribio forthcoming, in press) reveals that within one speaker’s speech there are segments that are replete with overt referential subject pronouns, whereas others contain very few, and the overt expletive *ello* appears in only a

² While Henríquez Ureña (1940) reports the pre-verbal positioning of subjects in infinitival clauses as possible for the expression of pronouns, it is described by Jiménez Sabater (1975) as having displaced the canonical post-verbal positioning only three decades later.

subset of the contexts where it is theoretically possible; moreover, the post-verbal position is employed, with greater frequency for pronominal than for full NP subjects, across the construction types discussed. In other words, Dominican Spanish exhibits properties of non-*pro*-drop languages, while at once demonstrating structures common to *pro*-drop languages. The co-existence of these typologies is readily observable in the speech samples produced by all of the speakers interviewed; such intra-dialectal variability will be central to the syntactic-theoretical analysis proffered in the ensuing discussion.

2. Characterizing Dialectal Variation within Parametric Limits

As laid out, the linguistic patterns manifest in Dominican Spanish reveal that this dialect has expanded to encompass morpho-syntactic constructions that are not uniformly reproduced in the dialects of other Latin American nations. One might speculate that these innovations reflect the contributions of linguistic contact. However, such a conjecture is not borne out in the findings of extensive research reported in the literature. Remarking on the potential import from the African languages that were carried to the Caribbean region, Lipski (1994) reports that “no major innovation in pronunciation, morphology or syntax in Latin American Spanish is due exclusively to the former presence of speakers of African languages or of any form of Afro-Hispanic language, creole or otherwise (1994:133).” And speaking specifically to Dominicans’ continued contact with the French-based creole of the adjoining nation, Lipski states, “the impact of Haitian Creole on Dominican Spanish is largely confined to the rural border region, and to life on the sugar plantations (1994:237).” Finally, in like manner, Jiménez Sabater (1975:168) cautions against attributing the innovations to linguistic contact with English: “Un rasgo morfosintáctico tan característico difícilmente habría podido calar de modo tan profundo en una masa analfabeta como la de nuestro país, donde predomina, antes bien, el arcaísmo castellano—o la evolución de tendencias lingüísticas netamente hispanas—y en la que apenas se cuentan escasos préstamos léxicos de otros idiomas, por oposición a lo que sucede con otras zonas antillanas como Puerto Rico en donde también es corriente este orden de palabras (‘A morpho-syntactic feature could have hardly reached so deeply into the illiterate masses of our country, where the linguistic tendencies lean towards the use of archaic Castilian forms or of typically Hispanic solutions and where lexical loans from other languages are rare and strikingly different from what occurs in other Caribbean areas like Puerto Rico where this word order is also common’).” We must, therefore, look beyond cross-linguistic contact in explicating the presence of the attested linguistic forms.

With few exceptions, studies of dialectal variation and change have, in the main, fallen outside the purview of theoretical linguistics, within the realm of dialectology (cf. Milroy 1992). To understand linguistic variation and change from a linguistic-theoretical perspective, we must understand the constraints on possible grammars offered by the nature of the language faculty, as put forth within linguistic theory, and in particular, within Principles and Parameters Theory (cf. the extensive research literature grounded in Chomsky 1981, 1986). Developed by reference to careful and deliberate comparisons between languages, Principles and Parameters Theory has refined its conceptual apparatus to a well-articulated structure consisting of a core system of universal principles, with cross-linguistic variation ascribed to well-delimited parametric differences. For example, linguistic scholars investigating *pro*-drop have assumed that

there exist languages such as Spanish and English that represent divergent settings. The question arises as to whether, and if so, how the theory can accommodate differences found between and within dialects of a single community. Considerations of parsimony dictate that the differences between Standard Latin American Spanish and Dominican Spanish should reflect possible grammatical differences, i.e., distinct choices of parameter settings, rather than unique language- and dialect-specific rules. In other words, the ways in which dialects differ (e.g., Dominican Spanish versus Standard Latin American Spanish) should mirror the ways in which languages differ from one another (e.g., Standard Spanish versus Standard English or French).

In fact, recent explorations of dialectal variation have revealed that dialects of languages in themselves have parameters, and as such, may also be defined within parametric limits (cf. Benincà 1989, Kayne 1994, Henry 1995). For example, in examining dialects of English, Henry (1997) concludes that the kind of variation attested between Belfast English and Standard English is broadly of the same type as that found between different languages. Advancing this line of inquiry, Wilson and Henry (1998:8) submit that "if dialects do set their parametric limits, then it would seem useful for theoretical linguists to take account of dialectal variation in explaining the necessity of linguistic diversity within Universal Grammar." From the point of view of linguistic theory, then, there should be nothing special about dialect variation as distinct from language variation. Articulating this same view, Benincà (1989:3) states, "In a linguistic group of interrelated dialects with little differentiation, we can expect to find realized only those possibilities which are admitted by the theory. It is evident, then, that the more the dialects are similar to one another, the more possible it becomes to find, for a specific grammatical area, the ideal case of some dialects differing only in respect to phenomena that can be traced unambiguously to a single parameter." Such a mode of inquiry is appropriate in the analysis of the data presented herein: Dominican Spanish presents a clustering of properties not present in Standard Latin American Spanish, a clustering which, *a priori*, would point to the presence of a second, co-existing grammar. That is, when viewed from a properly typological perspective, the linguistic patterns observed, which, as verified in previous and on-going research are systematically corroborated (cf. Toribio 1993b, 1996, forthcoming, in press), insinuate that Dominican Spanish is undergoing significant syntactic restructuring. The typological distinctions exemplified in the dialect may be interpreted as pointing to grammatical re-setting, "un hecho perfectamente explicable dentro de las posibilidades que ofrece el mismo sistema español ('a fact which is perfectly explainable within the possibilities that the self-same system of Spanish offers') (Jiménez Sabater 1975:169)." Thus, the complex of innovations is understood as circumscribing a grammatical option made available within the language system (a typological distinction readily observed within the Romance language family—witness the contrasts represented between Standard Spanish and French).

Yet, although the co-existence of distinct grammars of the same language in a single speech community has eluded characterization within the confines of traditional synchronic syntactic analyses, descriptions of such linguistic phenomena have characterized much recent study of language change and development. The application of the Principles and Parameters approach to grammar to the study of historical change was instigated by Lightfoot (1979) and has had fruitful results (cf. the collection of papers compiled and edited by van Kemenade and Vincent 1997). Especially relevant for the

present purposes is the view advocated by authors such as Kroch (1991) and Roberts (1993), who suggest that in the change from a grammatical property X to a distinct grammatical property Y, a language may demonstrate both X and Y simultaneously. On such a view, grammatical change is characterized by a transitional stage of co-existing, competing grammars. A similar state of affairs has been addressed in language acquisition, a central, motivating issue in linguistic theorizing. Whereas language development has been generally assumed to result from the addition of new formal properties and the deletion of pre-existing representations, researchers such as Roeper (1996) have explored the possibility that the addition of a new feature may change the status of previous structures in the grammar, without obliterating them. In this technical and yet intuitive sense, Roeper concludes, all children exhibit a form of bi-lingualism in the course of acquisition. In fact, he makes similar assertions regarding adult competence, suggesting that adult monolinguals too demonstrate "islands of bi-lingualism," as manifested in the deployment of syntactic operations which are commonly perceived as delimiting distinct speech modes (e.g., the formal preposing producing *whereafter*).

The foregoing observations converge in suggesting that a speaker's linguistic competence may be characterized as representing distinct grammars of what is commonly identified as a unitary language. And these self-same observations can be brought to bear on the present investigation into intra-dialectal variation or bi-dialectalism. Dominican speakers may be said to have available I-languages representing stages of the change from what in the literature is identified as a canonical *pro*-drop typology (e.g., Standard Spanish-type null subjects and post-verbal subjects) to a non-*pro*-drop typology (e.g., English- or French-type overt subjects and pre-verbal subjects). Accordingly, we postulate that a dual parameter setting is indicated for speakers of Dominican Spanish, and we turn to consider these inter- and intra-dialectal differences as they relate to parametric limits.

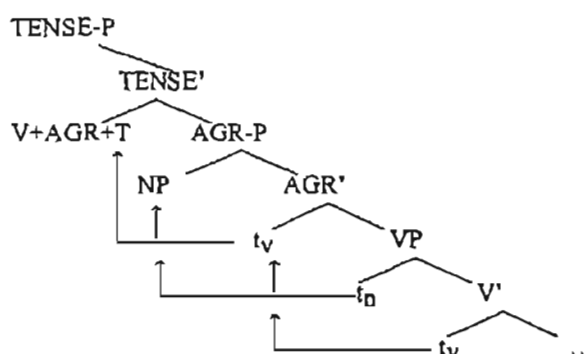
3. Dialectal Variation within the Minimalist Program

The aforementioned syntactically informed assessments of dialectal variation motivate the theoretical analysis to be put forth herein. More specifically, the descriptive generalizations that emerge from the comparison of patterns observed within this dialect, and between Dominican Spanish and Standard Latin American Spanish, will be analyzed within Chomsky's Minimalist Program, where linguistic variation is expressed in terms of strength of abstract morpho-syntactic features and (checking operations within) functional projections. The proposal thus re-examines the traditional notion that inflectional morphology, null subjects, and positional constraints are correlated in general syntactic derivations, but couches the inquiry within the Minimalist framework that has emerged in recent syntactic research. Within the restricted framework of Minimalist Program, differences between languages and language varieties are attributed to aspects of the lexicon and to the differences in the morphological features of the lexical elements that occupy functional category nodes. The strength of verbal and nominal features of the AGR and TENSE nodes varies independently, determining distinct language types.

Data concerning the placement of adverbs and negative markers provides evidence of overt verb-raising in Standard Latin American Spanish. As movement is triggered by strong features, we assume that the verbal features of AGR and TENSE are strong, ensuring that the verb will raise into these functional projections prior to Spell-

Out. When the verbal features of these inflectional heads have checked the features on the lexical item, they disappear. If the verb does not raise to AGR and TENSE overtly, the strong verbal features survive to PF, rendering the derivation illicit. Therefore, overt raising is a prerequisite for convergence in Standard Latin American Spanish. The morphological features of AGR and TENSE serve a second function, additionally checking the properties of the nominal that raises to their Specifier position. The nominal features of AGR check the phi-features of NP in SpecAGR; the nominal features of TENSE check the (nominative) Case features of NP in SpecTENSE. The nominal features of AGR also play a role in determining the availability of null subjects: Chomsky proposes that strong nominal AGR features are a prerequisite for null subjects. As Standard Latin American Spanish allows null subjects, we assume that the nominal features of AGR are strong; since the nominal features on AGR are strong, all subject NPs, both null and overt, must raise to SpecAGR prior to Spell-Out. However, since Standard Latin American Spanish permits VSO word order as an alternative to SVO in declaratives (as determined by theme-rheme considerations), we make the crucial assumption that TENSE dominates AGR in Spanish; a similar proposal is set forth by Pollock (1989) for French.³ In (9), then, the verb, drawn from the lexicon fully inflected, adjoins first to AGR where its phi-features are checked, and then to TENSE, where its tense features are checked. The raising of V takes place prior to Spell-Out, triggered by strong verbal features on the functional nodes. The subject NP raises from its position internal to the VP into SpecAGR, where its phi-features are checked. As the nominal features of AGR are strong (licensing null subjects), raising takes place overtly. But the nominal features on TENSE are weak and may appear at PF without causing a crash. Therefore, since convergence is compatible with Procrastinate, raising of the subject is delayed. (Note that since SpecTENSE is not filled prior to Spell-Out, it is not projected.) In accordance with this derivation, a subject NP will be realized in post-verbal position.

(9) Standard Latin American Spanish, with overt lexical subject

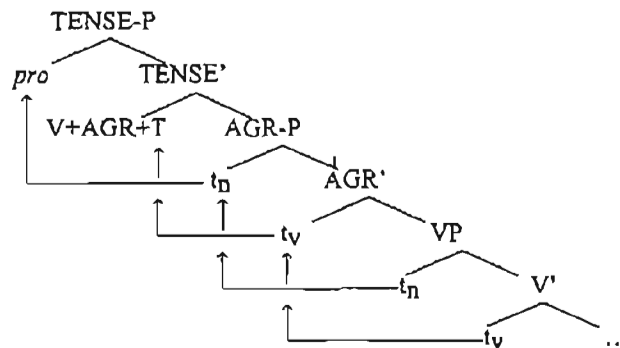


The analysis presented thus far, although adequately accounting for the patterns of word-order in Standard Latin American Spanish, do not fully account for the availability of null subjects. Strong nominal features on AGR are a necessary but insufficient condition for the licensing a null subject; the features of TENSE are also relevant to the licensing of null subjects. This intuition underlies Rizzi's (1986) theory on null subjects,

³ Such a reordering of the functional nodes is straightforward and consonant with Minimalist assumptions: feature strength on functional nodes is one element of language variation, relative positioning of these functional nodes is another.

according to which the formal licensing (associated with Case-marking) and identification of null pronouns are achieved by the same source. Updating Rizzi's theory, Chomsky claims that "*pro* is licensed only in the Spec-head relation to [$\text{Agr } \alpha \text{ Agr}$], where α is [+tense] or V, Agr strong or $V=V^*$," a special class of verbs (1995:176). As shown in (10), the verb raises to check off the verbal features of AGR and TENSE which are strong. As the nominal features of AGR are also strong, verb raising creates the [TENSE+AGR] complex required in the licensing of null subjects. The *pro* subject raises to SpecAGR, where it checks off strong nominal AGR features; raising of *pro* to SpecTENSE for Morphological Checking is precluded, as the nominal features of TENSE are weak. Nevertheless, we postulate that *pro* does raise to SpecTENSE. In Minimalist terms, raising is motivated by a "self-serving last resort" strategy, the principle of Greed (Chomsky 1995:201): raising of *pro* to SpecTENSE applies because it must, as required by *pro* theorem. Notably, raising of overt subjects is obviated on considerations of economy.

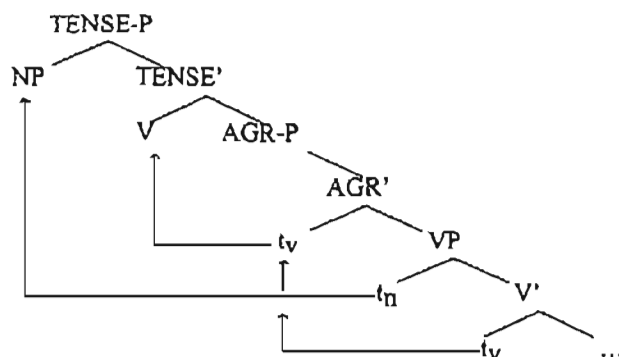
(10) Standard Latin American Spanish, with *pro* subject



Now, we have observed that in the Minimalist Program, Universal Grammar specifies the interface levels, the elements that constitute these levels and the computations by which they are constructed. Language variation in this program is determined by variation in the PF component and in aspects of the lexicon. For basic parametric differences in constituent ordering and in the licensing of null subjects, Chomsky looks to the AGR and TENSE nodes and their verbal and nominal features. Along the lines discussed, the placement of the verb relative to other elements of the sentence reveals important clues as to the nature of the functional heads TENSE and AGR in Dominican Spanish. As with Standard Latin American Spanish, in which the verbal features of TENSE and AGR are strong, and will be visible if not checked off, in Dominican Spanish main verbs must raise to AGR and TENSE before Spell-Out. Thus, we will not invoke the strength of verbal features in accounting for the linguistic innovations. Still in keeping with Minimalist assumptions, then, we turn to consider the nominal features of TENSE and AGR in accounting for the attested variability. Chomsky notes that a language might allow both weak and strong nominal features (1995:199). He points out, in particular, that Arabic demonstrates a VSO and SVO pattern which correlates directly with richness of verbal inflection. However, unlike what is observed in Arabic, post-verbal subjects in Dominican Spanish do not correlate with richness of inflection; that is, rather than demonstrating a stable and transparent system, this dialect represents a grammar which is in the process of restructuring. Assume that in Dominican

Spanish AGR incorporates weak nominal features. This morphological property has two effects: overt raising of NP to SpecAGR is precluded on grounds of economy, and null subjects cannot be licensed, as AGR is not endowed with the requisite phi-features. As discussed, this morphological property (call it 'B') exists alongside the setting which is attested also in Standard Latin American Spanish (property 'A'). The same considerations extend to the nominal features of TENSE: Dominican Spanish TENSE incorporates strong nominal features. This means that the dialect will demonstrate overt raising of NP to SpecT (consonant with the innovative property B), alongside short movement of NP to SpecAGR, as dictated by the weak nominal specification of TENSE (the 'older' A). Taking property A to be a nominal feature specification, we assume that it is the identical in Standard Latin American Spanish and Dominican Spanish. Property B, the innovation, is the property of interest to us here. The derivations which Dominican Spanish shares with Standard Latin American Spanish were shown in (9) and (10); the derivation which is determined by the innovative feature specifications is illustrated in (11). (The SpecAGR position remains empty prior to Spell-Out—it is not warranted on the grounds of Morphological Checking—and is not projected.)

- (11) Dominican Spanish, with weak nominal AGR features and strong nominal TENSE features



The proposal that has been presented herein is in keeping with central Minimalist premises, according to which the task of the language learner is to assemble the appropriate set of functional features on lexical items to drive the computational system of the grammar. Therefore, in a non-trivial sense, language variation and change represents the addition and reorganization of abstract feature specifications on lexical items and functional projections. Such a conceptualization is successfully invoked in explaining the distinct typological tendencies attested in Dominican Spanish—Dominican Spanish as demonstrating overt/pre-verbal subjects and null/post-verbal subjects at once. The contradiction is resolved if we assume that lexical items and functional projections may be specified as bearing weak nominal TENSE and strong nominal AGR features, or they may be marked as bearing the opposite specifications, namely, strong nominal TENSE and weak nominal AGR features. Thus, speakers of Dominican Spanish may be characterized as bi-lingual, demonstrating two distinct grammars, with contrasting TENSE and AGR feature specifications; this intralingual shift in TENSE and AGR features entails the presence or absence of particular syntactic derivations.

4 Conclusion

We have reviewed several types of synchronic evidence that converge in demonstrating that Dominican Spanish differs in significant respects from other Latin American Spanish varieties, and that the Dominican vernacular itself demonstrates notable intra-dialectal variability. In our analysis of these data, we have argued that the ways in which Dominican Spanish differs from Standard Latin American Spanish mirror the ways in which languages differ from one another, namely, within parametric limits. Dominican Spanish is distinguished as incorporating strong nominal TENSE and weak nominal AGR features, licensing derivations that incorporate overt pronominals and pre-verbal subjects. Moreover, the intra-dialectal variability noted in the speech samples collected, and corroborated in the extensive research literature, indicates that the dialect additionally presents weak nominal TENSE and strong nominal AGR features, motivating structures in which the normative null subjects and pre-verbal positioning are also licit. Accordingly, it has been argued that speakers of Dominican Spanish may acquire an L-language that is variable between parameter settings (strong versus weak) of nominal TENSE and AGR features. On this view, speakers are bi-lingual in their native language, acquiring two grammars with opposed, competing values for the relevant parameters. The availability of the 'old' forms (Standard Spanish-type *pro*-drop properties licensed by strong nominal AGR and weak nominal TENSE) alongside the innovations (English- and French-type non-*pro*-drop properties licensed by weak nominal AGR and strong nominal TENSE) is a state of affairs that typifies linguistic change in progress. Thus, though Dominican Spanish has maintained null pronouns and post-verbal subjects, hallmarks of *pro*-drop language typology, the possibility may be disappearing, and the prognosis for this regional vernacular is not in the introduction of the non-*pro*-drop patterns (overt subjects and fixed positional licensing, which are already in evidence), but in the suppression and subsequent loss of the older competing structures.

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